Fig. 45
John Lowry house. Manti.
G. E. Anderson. Photograph.
1888.

Fig. 46
John Lowry house. Manti.
Thomas R. Carter.
Photograph. 1979.
The obvious differences between this photograph and G. E. Anderson's 1888 photograph (Fig. 45) point to the problems scholars face in developing a clear image of historic architecture.

Such an interpretation of folk architecture, while convenient, remains problematic, for it is necessarily built on stereotypes of both folk culture and Mormon society and deals only marginally with the buildings themselves. Houses become what they *should be,* rather than what they actually *are.* If the study of folk housing is to be used effectively to tell us something about nineteenth-century Utah and thus transcend a nostalgic antiquarianism, thorough description must replace broad generalization. This collection of articles on Utah folk art can provide a forum in which to begin a new and systematic study of Utah folk housing. While this essay cannot be exhaustive and is itself a generalization, it can highlight several of the key aesthetic principles operative within the folk building tradition. Questioning the design assumptions which account for the house's appearance can illuminate meaningful clues in the architectural and historical puzzle.

Folk, Architecture, and Art

Folk objects have consistently been denied aesthetic merit. In a 1952 study of Utah architecture, David Winburn voiced a widely held opinion that the early Mormon homes were "in most cases so simple and unostentatious that it may be, in speaking of most of them, 'architecture' is too dignified a term to employ, since the term implies a conscious attempt toward artistic expression."[4] The recognition of a particular folk aesthetic is impeded by the feeling—deeply rooted in our western consciousness—that art is isolated in the progressive and elite segments of society. We are unaccustomed to the idea that the university-trained architect and the folk builder grapple with similar design problems. Their solutions may be different-one striving for innovation, the other inherently conservative-but both are united by the common desire to produce an attractive finished product. No builder consciously rejects the right to artistic expression. All arrifacts-and this includes pioneer dwellings-are shaped with an eye for the aesthetic.[5]

If folk buildings today appear starkly utilitarian, they are nevertheless discourteously relegated to a rigid craft category. Eulogies to good craftsmanship, however well intended, inherently circle back to exaltation of the pragmatic at the expense of the artistic. In such a scheme, craftsmen become insensitive machines that blindly crank out useful objects with no thought to outward appearance. In one study of a Mormon village, Cindy Rice points to this seeming incompatibility between folk and style: "The Mormon style house, with its austere lines, symmetry, and primarily brick or rock construction imparts a feeling of permanence and purpose but not frivolity."[6]

While durability is admittedly an important factor influencing any builder, this preoccupation with the practical implies that folk objects can have no beauty save in economy. A house, however, is more than any scholar's set of "juxtaposed rectangles"[7] and in life is imbued with a variety of specific functions.[8] The roof keeps out the rain and the windows let in light, but in addition the total house is visually pleasing to the builder and others in the community. Most contemporary examples of architecture are considered successful if they demonstrate singularity (or effectively emulate popular elements of an original idea). The folk builder, on the other hand, achieves his goal if his design resembles the familiar. The building of a house is an important event: Time and money are expended on a structure which confers status upon its occupant. Decisions affecting house design cannot be frivolous in a careless and haphazard sense; design decisions can, however, be playful and sensitive to particular ideas about beauty. The realization that both progressive and conservative designs are expressive gestures makes possible a meaningful synthesis of the concepts of folk, architecture, and art.

A folk house can be studied as art because it is the material articulation of a specific designing process. By concentrating on the more inclusive concept of design, the exclusive and prescriptively "elitist" meanings of the word *art* can be avoided. Kenneth Ames has recently suggested "that it is time to admit that art is not an eternal truth but a time-linked and locally variable concept, its definition being altered in response to complex patterns of social interaction."[9] In shifting away from the study of art to the study of the "designed world," the realm of aesthetic experience is opened up to all people. The mansion on Salt Lake City's South Temple street and the stone house in Willard both comply with the visual requirements of their respective audiences. Neither design is better than the other, nor is one considered "art" and the other something less. A house is not folk because of the way it looks but because its basic plan is traditional within the culture that produced it. *Folk* describes the process of building and not the absence of style.[10]

The likes, dislikes, and persistent needs of Utah's pioneer builders are thus expressed to some extent in the controlling decisions which shaped their houses. Design preferences can be discerned in three main areas: construction, decoration, and composition. By describing such complex and interrelated patterns, the folklorist can aid the historian in the attempt to breathe life back into the material landscape.

Building Zion: The Techniques of Settlement, Driven from Illinois into the desert wilderness of Utah, the Mormon pioneers were well aware of the biblical overtones of

their exodus. Church leaders quickly appropriated theJudeo-Christian concept of wilderness as a Symbolic device. The formidable Great Basin offered the Mormon people sanctuary from a persecuting society and became the place where the faithful would be tested." These Latter-day Saints quite naturally felt no special concern for the preservation of wilderness. As the kingdom of God was erected in the mountains, the desert would give way to earthly paradise. The inherent conflict between the opposing ideas of wilderness and garden created a dichotomy readily exploited in Church rhetoric.

The individual pioneers, however, saw such a conflict dramatically before them: The rugged mountains, endless skies, and semiarid valleys must have struck these dislodged Easterners as awesome indeed. From that first day in 1847 when the creeks of Salt Lake Valley were diverted for irrigation water, the struggle against the wilderness was joined. The village townscape (Pig. 47) which became ubiquitous in Utah, with its geometrically defined streets and overstated visual order, comforted the settlers by effectively drawing a boundary between man and nature.[12] Domestication was the watchword. The Church's President, Brigham Young, instructed his followers not to ravage and despoil the land, but rather to subdue it and make it beautiful:

There is a great work for the Saints to do; progress and improve upon and make beautiful everything around you. Cultivate the earth and cultivate your minds. Build cities, adorn your habitations, make gardens, orchards and vineyards, and render the earth so pleasant that when you look upon your labors you may do so with pleasure, and that angels may delight to come and visit your beautiful locations.[13]

The Edenic garden envisioned by the Utah Mormons would become the blueprint for the world of the future. Following the Parousia, the Millennium would be ushered in according to the plan which the Saints had established in Utah. In their efforts to realize the prophecy, the kingdom builders of the Great Basin sent nature reeling before them. The rejection of nature forms the first tenet of the folk architectural aesthetic.

The conflict between garden and wilderness is not peculiar to Utah or to any particular religious group; this simple opposition is a persistent theme echoing throughout American history. Early colonists reached the shores of this continent confident that a true paradise awaited their arrival. The seventeenth century viewed America as a land of "fabulous riches, a temperate climate, longevity, and garden-like natural beauty."[14] Greeted by the harshness of a "howling wilderness," these newcomers struggled valiantly to transform wild reality back into Edenic dream. Untamed land

threatened man on two levels: First, the untouched forest darkness harbored ferocious beasts, savage men, and demons of the imagination; second, and on a deeper level, wilderness was believed to be an area where civil and moral laws became inoperative and behavioral restraints broke down. Wilderness was an affront to the sensibilities of man.

The story of the domestication of our continent is well known; the forest was cleared, crops planted, and the land transformed into an arrangement of farms, roads, and cities. The "pioneer tradition" which conquered the land had little sympathy for nature. The French historian, Alexis de Tocqueville, visited America in 1831 and rightly observed that "living in the wilds, [the pioneer] only prizes the works of man."[15] Plow and axe would effectively control the natural world. "When Brigham Young spoke of "beautiful houses," his concept of beauty was consistent with that of his fellow frontier travelers: He was looking for a beauty based on arrificiality. The folk design aesthetic is built around the square, not the circle; it favors the smooth over the roughness of texture and glorifies the balanced over the irregular. The organic is stifled by the synthetic. In building up Zion, the Utah Mormons followed a well-worked-out American tradition of "turning nature into culture."[16]

The Mormon landscape is self-consciously controlled and fundamentally synthetic. While the settlers were forced by necessity in the first years to hovel in dugouts, the experience only intensified their antipathy to nature. If compelled to utilize native materials like adobe, stone, and logs in building permanent structures, their technology allowed them to mold these materials into the geometry of civilization. The various construction techniques employed in Utah demonstrate the settlers' willingness to devote considerable time and expense to differentiate the human from the natural landscape.[17]

Logs for dwellings were usually sawed or hewn square and were thus deprived of their identity as round trees. Often the logs were further disguised by the application of lumber siding or plaster (Fig. 50).

The organic irregularities of stone were chiseled into a smooth regularity of pattern pleasing to the settler's eye. The process of quarrying the stone, hauling it to the building site, shaping it into blocks, and placing the mortar in evenly coursed lines transcends pioneer expediency (Fig. 49A-C).

Clay was extracted from the ground, mixed with sand, and molded into the adobe bricks which became the most commonly used of all Mormon building materials. To help protect sun-dried " 'dobies" from the weather, walls were often plastered to present a smooth exterior finish. Plastering helped to preserve the fragile bricks, but it

also made the house more attractive. In many parts of the state a "bricking" technique was used: the outer layer of plaster was colored with red brick dye and then scored to create an adobe facsimile of a kiln-fired brick home (Fig. 48).[18] "Fake stone" houses were also created by ingenious builders in a similar manner.

In shaping the house exterior, the Utah builder makes his meaning clear: Gold camps and railroad towns might come and go, but the Mormon communities would stay as permanent fixtures on the land. The West might indeed be wild and woolly, but the civilized world reigned in Utah. The house goes beyond practicality of shelter in affirming that Mormonism is a "correct, wholesome, and successful way of life."[19] As the folklorist Austin Fife reminds us, "their [the houses'] every line bespeaks the will to survive with dignity and the rationale of a well ordered household in a well ordered world."[20]

Decoration: Fashion on the Frontier. Driven by the desire for permanence and decency in a hostile environment, the early Utah settlers moved quickly away from the "dug-out" level of subsistence. Throughout the state in the 1850s and 1860s homes began to appear which displayed an ever-increasing concern for the comforts and fashions left behind in the East. Brigham Young's first Salt Lake City residence and later the building called the Lion House (1857-58) both exhibited features of architectural design well above the minimal requirements of shelter.[21] The Saints, following Brigham's concern for beauty, demonstrated a remarkable capability for building substantial dwellings and for keeping their designs abreast of current architectural ideas. While the folk-building tradition remained strong, popular architectural fashions were translated by builders into decorative features on the exterior of the house.

Mormon society has never known the stark, self-imposed asceticism of some American religious sects. The doctrine of continued revelation has allowed the Latter-day Saints to accept theological and cultural changes in a progressive manner.[22] Popular architectural fashions were greeted enthusiastically in Utah. While traditional house plans like the temple form, double-pen, hall and parlor, and central-hall types (see Figs. 51A-D) dominated much of nineteenth-century Utah building,[23] these basic house plans showed a vigorous flexibility in accommodating the fashionable whims of their owners. The architectural historian Peter Goss has identified five major styles surfacing in Utah during the 1847-90 period: Federal, Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Second Empire, and the various styles associated with the Victorian period.[24] Of these styles, the first three had the greatest impact on the folk builder's design and appear primarily as decoration applied to the house facade. Despite such external embellish-

Fig. 47
Manti at sunset. Manti. The nucleated village settlement pattern successfully insulated human activity from the surrounding •wilds.